

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. An isolated nucleic acid molecule consisting essentially of a polynucleotide having a nucleotide sequence selected from the group consisting of:

- C1
- (a) the nucleotide sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1;
 - (b) a nucleotide sequence encoding the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO. 2; and
 - (c) a nucleic acid sequence that is complementary to the nucleic acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1.

C2

18. (Amended) An expression vector comprising an isolated nucleic acid molecule of claim 1 that comprises a nucleotide sequence encoding the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID No: 2 or a nucleotide sequence that is complementary to a nucleic acid sequence encoding the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID No: 2; and control elements for expression of the nucleic acid molecule in a suitable host cell.

Please add the following new claims:

C3

31. (new) An isolated nucleic acid molecule consisting essentially of a polynucleotide having a nucleotide sequence that is least 70% identical to the sequence of SEQ ID NO: 1 and that encodes a polypeptide having activity of inducing proliferation of vascular endothelial cells and of inhibiting apoptosis of vascular endothelial cells upon serum starvation in culture.--

--32. (New) An expression vector comprising the nucleic acid
molecule of claim 31 --